

Cultural and Economic Development Committee Meeting Minutes

April 29, 2014

Members Present: Councilors Armstrong, Dowdle, and Kretser

Also present: Amy Bonn Planning/Grant Writing Consultant, The Finch Network

Meeting Overview

Since the City has consulted with Ms. Bonn regarding the planning process in the past, the Committee met with Ms. Bonn at this first committee meeting in order to discuss present planning projects, as well as current and future grant opportunities. The conversation further encompassed what shape the Community Development Office might take in the future: what are our options, taking into account both the office's potential for generating economic and cultural development, and current and future budget constraints?

Visioning Project Grant

As a result of Ms. Bonn's and Councilor Kretser's attendance at a recent meeting with Andy Lambruzzo, Coastal Resources Specialist with the NYS department of State, the two were able to describe how this project will proceed. With grant monies applied for through the Office of Engineering and Planning, and recently granted by the NY Department of State, the City has \$108,000 that will be used to for a Visioning Project. With part of the money, the City will contract with a consulting firm that specializes in planning to manage the project. One of the activities in the grant is to review the City's planning documents and to consider how putting this information into a database that could be accessed via a website would be helpful to City departments as well as other city businesses and nonprofits doing research or grant applications.

To articulate a 21st Century Vision for Plattsburgh, *A Project Advisory Committee* (PAC), comprised of 12-15 community members, will meet over the course of the project. In addition, public input will be sought at four community outreach forums known in planning circles as Sherets [sic]. The public will have the opportunity to provide feedback about Plattsburgh's Vision.

Councilors asked, "How can the City invite more, even broader based input, and thereby democratize the visioning process to the fullest extent?" Ms. Bonn suggested that the City take advantage of the summer months to collect information from as many stakeholders as possible. Points of inquiry comprised of Six Key Questions, for example, might also be developed in collaboration with the Town of Plattsburgh. Community members could be trained to survey the public. Information could be coded and compared to produce data that could be consulted for planning and perhaps even joint grant writing projects sponsored by Team Plattsburgh.

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Current Grant Opportunities

Ms. Bonn discussed the NYS Consolidated Funding Applications (CFA) that will be available very soon. During the Visioning meeting on Monday, Andy Lambruzzo and Melissa McManus encouraged the City to consider applying for a Priority Project if they could identify a “ready to build/create project that would generate jobs and promote tourism”. The City can also consider applying for CFA funding for smaller, specific projects through the CFA process. Dock Street, Durkee Street and the Beach are all possibilities for this funding stream. By way of example Ms. Bonn outlined two possible projects. The CFA deadline is mid-July.

Possibilities: A Future Community Development Office

Councilors asked Ms. Bonn to offer suggestions about how to reinstate the Community Development Office, given the present need for frugality as the City faces very challenging budget constraints. As the Mayor and Councilors have grappled with this question, they have considered several possibilities. There is money in the 2014 budget that is currently being used for contracting services, such as those Ms. Bonn has provided. What are the possibilities?

Ms. Bonn prefaced her opinion, by stating, very honestly, that she would reply as one who has a professional interest in the answer to that question. Her profession equips her to have very specific recommendations that she in fact could execute if she were to be hired in that office. With that said, she said ultimately we should consult other local professionals who could present their own ideas about creating a functional office sooner, rather than later.

Ms. Bonn went on to explain that it would be possible to open the office by contracting services with a community development professional. Contracting services gives the city the flexibility observe budgetary limitations because fringe benefits would not be necessary. She encouraged us to first think of shorter-term position, perhaps one that lasts for the remainder of this fiscal year. We might even consider whether agreeing to a three or four-year contract would enable the City to effectively proceed with planning and development objectives. A short term contract would allow for flexibility--the ability to evaluate whether the office is meeting desired outcomes, as well as whether it is cost effective-- before we consider a longer term commitment to the office.

The Councilors asked Ms. Bonn to outline what services a firm such as hers (The Finch Network) might provide for the City.

Respectfully submitted,

Rachelle Armstrong

Councilor, Ward 1